

# Dr. Thomas J. Whelan... the finest surgeon

COL (ret.) Yeu-Tsu Margaret Lee MD

I came to work as a general surgeon at the Tripler Army Medical Center in August of 1983. I did not know Dr. Whelan at first, but I saw his picture on the wall outside the Department of Surgery's office. Under his pictures, it said: "Brigadier General, Chief of Surgery, July 1969 – June 1971." I was very impressed, because other Chiefs of Surgery were all Colonels.

I was more impressed when I attended his teaching conferences. He used to come to Tripler at least twice a week for GI conference and for the resident seminar. When he was in the room, all the residents and staffs were at attention. He asked questions in such a way, that we did not feel threatened. Not only could he explain complex issues in simple terms, but his analysis of alternative diagnoses made perplexing cases seemed obvious. He had vast surgical experiences and he published many papers relating to arterial and venous diseases.<sup>1-6</sup> In addition, all military surgeons should read his reports about lessons learned in the Viet Nam war and Korean conflict.<sup>7-11</sup>

On a personal note, I found Dr. Whelan was a true educator....he encouraged women to go to medical schools and he did not discourage women who wanted to be surgeons. Unlike some surgeons who appeared to be egotistic, Dr. Whelan was always a gentleman. Despite his busy schedule, he and Mrs. Whelan came to one of my dance parties. Later, they also took ballroom dance lessons themselves.

Besides his contributions to surgery and medical education, Dr. Whelan has enriched the lives of many, many people. At the annual residents graduation parties, he usually led the crowd in singing "McNamara's Band." We'll miss him, because as the song said: "he is the leader of the band. Although we're few in number, he is the finest in the land."

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J.J. McNamara MD & Tom Whelan MD (June 1984), leading "McNamara's Band"



From the left: Dr. Whelan, Major General James Peek, Harriet (Dr. Whelan's Secretary), Dr. Yeutsu M. Lee.